

1913 Liberty:

A nickel that's worth a lot more

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions about old coins and currency.

Q—A coin company says it will pay "up to \$95,000 for certain nickels dated before 1914." What could be worth so much money?—T.L., Maquoketa, Ia.

A—The advertisement may refer to the 1913 Liberty nickel, a coin steeped in hobby lore. Federal bureaucrats had intended to produce the country's last Liberty nickels in 1912, replacing them with the so-called Buffalo nickels in 1913. One or more workers secretly made a handful [probably five] of 1913-dated Liberty nickels using official government dies and sneaked them out of the mint in Philadelphia.

Hobby records indicate that in 1919 a man offered to pay \$500 for a 1913 Liberty nickel, possibly the first printed reference to the coin. In a 1978 private sale, one of the pieces exchanged hands for \$200,000.

You shouldn't waste your time looking for the rarities because all five known specimens are in collections. Meanwhile, con artists have made hundreds of worthless imitations over the years, sometimes peddling the forgeries to unsuspecting would-be investors.

Q—My father gave us three pieces of German currency printed in 1920, with denominations ranging from 10 to 100 marks. Where can we go to trade in these "Reichsbanknotes" for United States dollars at the current exchange rate?—A.N., Cicero

A—Sorry, but German currency printed before 1948 has no legal tender value. Your bills command little premium on the hobby market because of the huge number of similar notes that survive in collections.

Q—Abe Lincoln faces right on the cent, but presidents shown on our other coins face left. Why? I called the Philadelphia mint for an answer, but they were unable to help me.—L.B., Chicago Heights

A—Many coin designs, no longer minted, have right-facing portraits, including Ben Franklin on the half-dollar, the Indian on the Buffalo nickel and Miss Liberty on the Barber dime, quarter and half.

Q—We've got a cigar box filled with U.S. \$2 bills. Might they be valuable or are we saving them needlessly?—L.K., East Chicago, Ind.

A—The answer depends on the series year and general condition of each bill. As a rule, most deuce notes owned by novices have little value to collectors.

Series 1976 bills are worth \$2, their face amount. You might as well spend bills from the various 1953 and 1963 series [U.S. notes with red Treasury seals] unless they are in crisp, uncirculated condition or nearly so.